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DEPUTY AT-LARGE WHIP

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON
RURAL AND URBAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP
CHAIRMAN

May 22, 2008

Madam Chair, Members of the Subcommittee:

Last November I introduced H.R. 4088, the bipartisan SAVE Act, with 44 Democrats and 46 Republicans committed to stopping illegal immigration through improved border security, employment verification and increased interior enforcement.

Today, 243 Members of Congress from 44 states have joined their constituents in calling for a debate and a vote on the SAVE Act in one form or another.

All of us agree that illegal immigration is one of the most pressing issues facing America today and that we cannot continue ignoring this problem by passing it on to future Congresses and future Presidents.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection estimates that over 12 million people are currently here illegally and as many as 6,000 illegal aliens are breaching our borders every day.

The vast majority of these individuals come to our country in good faith to find work and a better life for their families.

The SAVE Act recognizes that America is a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws-----Madam Chair, these are not opposing values.

Yet while our country must have a welcome mat to those who come here legally, we must also consider the rules of entry, the costs illegal immigration place on local and state governments, and the effect on millions of American citizens who are unemployed.

While the SAVE Act has a strong emphasis on border security and interior enforcement, the real thrust of my legislation deals with employment verification.

Dishonest employers who seek to exploit low-skilled immigrant labor are the primary cause for the rapid increase in our illegal population.

In most cases, the jobs they offer act as a magnet, drawing people over 20 foot walls and through inhumane desert conditions to find work.

Two decades ago, our government sought to stop illegal hiring through the use of the Form I-9 for all new employees hired after November 1986.

While employment verification is current law, Form I-9 compliance alone requires business owners to be document experts as they determine if an ID is valid---this places serious liability upon them if they make a mistake.

To deal with these concerns, Congress created the Basic Pilot Program in 1996 that is now known as E-VERIFY.

The SAVE Act would expand this pilot program nationwide over a four year period, affecting 40,000 larger businesses in the first year and slowly including smaller businesses in the final three years.

E-VERIFY is a Web-based system that electronically verifies whether or not an individual can legally work in the United States.

E-VERIFY is free, easy to use, and it allows participating employers to successfully match 94% of new hires to DHS and SSA databases in less than 5 seconds.

Of the remaining 6% that are not matched, less than 1 in 6 of those employees bother to contest the result.

There are currently more than 65,000 employers representing 240,000 worksites using E-VERIFY.

More than 1,000 employers are enrolling each week.

The system has the capacity to process 25 million queries per year and is currently being updated and expanded.

E-VERIFY outlines fair and proper methods of using the system in multiple languages to protect employees from discriminatory hiring practices.

E-Verify gives employers the tools they need to follow our nation's immigration laws and to avoid the penalties that result from hiring illegal aliens.

Madam Chair, I have the utmost confidence in this program, as does the Republican Secretary of Homeland Security and the Democratic Governor of Arizona, who recently signed into law legislation making E-VERIFY mandatory for all employers in the state.

Every Congressional staffer and employee of a federal agency has passed through the E-VERIFY system over the past decade.

E-VERIFY is required by law in varying degrees in Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Minnesota, Utah, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and my home state of North Carolina.

Prior to each state making this effort, several interest groups warned of impending disaster if E-VERIFY became law.

Yet a spokeswoman for the Arizona Chamber of Commerce, a group that opposed E-VERIFY in its state legislature last year recently said:

- fewer problems have been reported than originally feared
- companies have not left the state in reaction to E-VERIFY, and
- employers have not reported major problems with the database.

As of last week, DHS was unaware of one case since 1996 when a U.S. citizen was denied employment because of an error with the E-VERIFY system.

It is my belief that Congress must find the necessary funds to enforce immigration laws, secure the border, protect American workers and provide for retirees and the disabled.

Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the SAVE Act today.

I am pleased that your committee is taking on this vital issue with a common sense approach.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.